The Effectiveness of Targeted Political Advertisements

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TARGETED POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENTS

By

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Abstract

Political campaigns are increasingly turning to Internet advertisements to reach potential voters. These advertisements are designed to target a person’s specific policy preferences. A series of three surveys were administered to students at EMU. The purpose was to determine the effects of targeted Internet-style advertisements on a person’s perception of a candidate, their motivation to vote, and their knowledge of the candidate’s platform. The results show that targeted advertisements tend to be more effective than non-targeted advertisements in improving a voter’s perception of a candidate and increasing their motivation to vote. The results also shed light on the inferences that voters make about a candidate’s policy positions even when working with limited information.
Introduction

By May 2012, the presidential campaigns of Mitt Romney and Barack Obama had spent eight times as much on internet advertising than both presidential campaigns in all of 2008. Internet advertising is now a major part of American politics and its influence will only continue to grow in the future. There are very good reasons for this. It is a far more efficient form of advertising and allows the targeting of certain groups who will be more likely to vote for a candidate. Internet users who perform a Google search on a topic will receive advertisements that are relevant to their keywords. Social Media allows its users to share their interests and personal information with their friends and family, but also makes this information available to advertisers. These advertisers can then target users who would be most interested in their products. As campaign expenditures show, political campaigns have begun using these same strategies. But unlike in business where the end goal is to get a consumer to buy a product or service, the end goal of a campaign is to get a citizen to vote for a candidate.

There is research to suggest that targeted advertising positively effects people’s perception of a candidate (Nadeau, Nevitte, Gidengil, & Blais, 2008). There is also research that points to a correlation between different types of advertising, like attack ads and voter turnout (Lau, Sigelman, & Rovner, 2007). A relatively unexplored area is the effect of targeted internet advertisements on a person’s probability to vote, perception of the candidate and knowledge acquired through the advertisement. Through a series of surveys this paper will examine these important questions and shed light on the end results of strategies that current political campaigns are pursuing.
Literature Review

In 1789, America held its first presidential election, celebrating the ideal that the people of a nation should come together and choose who governs them. Today 224 years later, our democratic institutions are as strong as ever, but the way our elections are run would be quite foreign to the citizenry of the 1800s. The way Americans seek elected office has changed as rapidly as the technology of communication. We no longer rely on party operated newspapers and long candidate speeches as voters did in the early part of our nation’s history. The American campaign has adapted itself to newspapers, radio, television, and currently the internet.

In the early stages of the internet, the most common method of reaching people was through email and online forums. This was successfully used by the campaigns of Howard Dean and to a lesser extent by George W. Bush. These were extremely insignificance aspects of their overall campaigns. The internet became much more important with the advent of the “new media.”

In the Book “Campaigning in the Twenty-First Century: A Whole New Ballgame?” by Dennis W. J., the effects of the “new media” on campaigns and elections and their ability for micro-targeting constituents are discussed. The work provides an excellent overview of the increasing role that campaigns have assigned to the new media. Johnson details the evolution of micro-targeting. He discusses many of the private firms that collect voter data and work with campaigns. These firms organize the data they collect and sell it to campaigns. Johnson details how this type of micro-targeting was used successfully by Bush to win Ohio, and was later refined in 2008 by the Obama campaign. One example, that Johnson uses, is the company called
Spotlite, which caters to the Democratic Party. Spotlite divided voters based on their neighborhood details, family sizes, and purchasing behavior into 15 “tribes.” Their research postulated that the tribe they called “Barn Raisers” if swayed, could win the election for Obama against McCain. So the democratic advertisers made a special effort to target these specific voters.

When the internet first came into existence very few people even had personal computers let alone an internet access, but this is no longer the case. Large sections of the population now have access to the internet and it is one of the most common forms of mass media available to the American voter. Pew Research Center’s report on Internet, broadband, and cell phone statistics detailed the growing internet access that Americans enjoy (Rainie, 2010). The report found that 74% of Americans 18 years old and older use the internet. 79% of English-speaking adults use the internet. 60% of American adults have broadband internet connections in their homes and 55% of American adults connect to the internet wirelessly, either through a Wi-Fi or their cell phones. While internet usage is highly concentrated with young people, 93% of all people aged 18-29 use the internet. It is broadly used by older generations as well. For example 70% of people between the ages of 50 and 65 say they use the internet. Internet usage is important in examining targeted political communication. The internet provides the ideal venue for collecting information about a voter and also delivering personalized messages to the voter.

Yang and Dia (2008), discuss alternative ways that advertisers can target potential clients. They begin with a history of research methods and use the new technology to target the consumer. They briefly discuss many of the conventional (non-internet) ways of targeting
clients. They describe an algorithm that uses readily available data from Facebook to target consumers in the same way. They are able to calculate a person's closest friends and then are able to aggregate their interests to place them into demographics that can easily be marketed to. The article was written specifically for people who would be creating marketing strategies for companies and was relatively technical, but provided some good insight on how companies or political campaigns can cheaply and automatically use information freely provided by users to narrow them into certain "subgroups" or "tribes."

The main benefit, of isolating people into demographics, is the ability to use targeted ads that appeal specifically to people's interests. Many times a candidate will change her pitch to a certain demographic or will use what is known as issue ads. Issue ads talk about a single important issue for a voter, like the environment, taxes or abortion. Sometimes they are accompanied by information linking them to a candidate and other times they do not list any information about a candidate.

An article titled "The Effects of Issue Advocacy Advertisement on Voters' Candidate Issue Knowledge and Turnout" by Soontae, Jin and Pfau, examined the effects of issue advertisements on voter knowledge and motivation in light of the 2000 election. They used data from the National Election Study combined with ad tracking data from the Campaign Media Analysis Group to conduct their research. They found that those individuals who lived in areas with higher numbers of issue ads had higher candidate knowledge than those who lived in areas with fewer issue ads. They also found that people in areas where lots of ads were run were also
more likely to get out and vote. Given this study, conventional (television, radio, et.) issue advertisements have a positive effect on our democratic process.

Issue advertisements also affect how voters perceive their candidates and their desire to vote for a particular candidate over another. Pfau, Holbert, Szabo, and Kaminski (2002) examined special interest group advertisements on single issues contrasted with traditional campaign advertisements funded by a candidate's campaign fund. Their study found no significant differences on viewer's preferences between the two types of advertisements. However they did uncover the fact that issue advertisements were more effective in influencing independents and had hardly any effect on partisans. They also found that candidate sponsored advertising predominately affected the perceptions of republicans as compared to democrats. Overall, voters learned more from candidate sponsored advertisements rather than advertisements that just featured one particular issue. These advertisements were all run in conventional media sources (television, radio, etc.) so it would be interesting to see how they would apply if their format were to be changed for the internet.

The way voters react and process information is also very important to the study of the effects of media and elections. The article, titled The Impact of Political Advertising on Knowledge, Internet Information Seeking and Candidate Preference by Nicholas Valentino, Vincent Hutchings and Dmitri Williams, attempts to determine the effects of political advertising on various demographics of voters. They used a computer based approach. First they gave a survey to establish political knowledge. Then the participant watched either three actual Bush or Gore advertisements and then filled out another survey. This research laid out the varying
effects of political information on the knowledge level of the voter. The study found that voters, with the highest awareness of political facts, experienced the largest gains in information. It also found that voters were able to make inferences about other parts of the candidate’s platform by an advertisement. The most aware voters also use information in advertisements as a substitute for other kinds of information seeking. Voters, with less knowledge about politics, are not motivated to find new knowledge whether they are shown an advertisement or not. They also note that voters with less knowledge about politics are more susceptible to persuasion by watching ads than the most knowledgeable are.

Overby and Barth (2009) compared the effects of television ads, radio ads, and campaign-related e-mails. They found that various types of media have differing effects on citizen attitudes. They used a data set from Brigham Young University’s Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy. By asking in-depth questions about media sources, the authors came to some surprising conclusions. They found that television ads tend to undermine attitudes of voters that support the status quo and the electoral process. While radio ads have an overall positive effect on how voters view the electoral process and status quo, their study found no discernible impact on voters from campaign emails.

Gibson and McAllister (2011) examined the extent and nature of the use of the internet by voters as well as political campaigns in the Australian federal elections. Their research showed that there are bigger advantages for smaller parties in using internet strategies. For example, 1/5 of Green party voters said that information on the internet helped them make their
voting decisions. The voting trends are not as pronounced for the larger parties in Australian politics.

The end goal of a campaign is to get people to vote for a particular candidate. So how do advertisements strategies work for getting people out to vote? Clinton and Lapinski (2004) discuss how negative advertisements affect voter turnout. There are disputes about whether negative advertisements motivate or demobilize voters in elections. Clinton and Lapinski set out to add more information to this debate. Their study ultimately found that negative advertisement had no overall depressing effect on voter turnout and actually increased turnout slightly.

Based on the articles above, campaign communication is one of academia’s favorite areas of study. Most of these articles discuss the effects of television and radio advertising, with only a few investigations into internet advertising. This project sets out to examine in greater detail the effect of targeted “social media” advertising on a person’s perception of a candidate, their motivation to vote, and their level of knowledge gained.

Methodology

The sample for this project was Eastern Michigan University Students. The participants were recruited from eight political science courses taught at the Ypsilanti campus. Of these courses, five of them were introductory level and three were 300 level and above. To be able to survey these courses, I contacted professors and asked if I would be able to administer a 10 minute survey at the beginning of their class. The characteristics of the population in the introductory courses were generally incoming freshmen to EMU. They were between the ages
of 17 and 19, had a high school education and were mostly female respondents. The characteristics of the population in the 300 level courses were Political Science majors or EMU students with strong interests in politics. They were generally older between the ages of 20 and 25, had completed two years of college, and were mostly male respondents. To help recruit participants for the survey, I offered an incentive of being entered into a raffle for five EMU sweatshirts.

Three surveys were used for this study. The first survey was printed and administered in class. This was followed by two emailed online surveys separated by a period of one week. The first survey asked some general demographic information, like age, gender, and economic status growing up. Family economic status was be assessed by asking participants to place themselves on a five point scale, with the lowest being “Basic Needs Not Met” to at the highest being “Needs Met with Lots of Luxuries.” This question eliminated the need for a student to know their family’s exact income and was not as invasive into a student’s private life. Asking the participants about their family’s income in this manner theoretically would provide higher response rates than asking them for the exact dollar amount of their family’s income.

Next the participants were asked which political ideology they most identify with (Republican / Democrat). Then they were asked about the degree to which they identify with that ideology, measured on a seven point scale from strong Democrat to strong Republican. This is the same scale used by the National Election Study. They were also asked about which candidate they planned to vote for in 2012. They were asked to rank five political issues in the 2012 election cycle on a scale of most important to least important. These issues were Abortion,
Environmental Regulation, Federal Deficit, Gay Marriage, and Gun Issues. Next they were asked to rank the same five issues on a scale of 1 to 7 for their political views with 1 being the Liberal / Democrat position and 7 being the Conservative / Republican position.

The last section of the survey asked the participants a series of nine questions to gauge their political knowledge. One of the questions asked them to place Barack Obama and Mitt Romney on a scale of liberal and conservative. Next they were asked to name the positions held by 6 individuals including, Rick Snyder, Hillary Clinton, and John Boehner. Finally they were asked what branch of government can tax and spend and what branch can declare war. Previous studies have shown that people with varying amounts of political knowledge are affected differently by information. This set of questions was intended to examine this effect.

After the completion of this survey, the students were emailed a political advertisement with a link to an online survey. The advertisements that they received were based on Facebook advertisements by both campaigns. The advertisements featured the candidate they indicated they would be most likely to vote for in the 2012 election. They received both a general ad about a candidate which did not mention anything specific about certain policies. Then they received an advertisement that was targeted at their highest ranked political issue that matched their candidate of preference’s position. Half of the students received the general advertisement first and the other half received the targeted advertisement first. After looking at the ad, the participants followed the link and were taken to an online survey. The online survey asked them three questions. How the advertisement affected their perception of the candidate was measured on a five point scale from “drastically improve” to “drastically worsen”. They were then asked
how much more likely someone like themselves would be to get out and vote for that candidate. They were given a scale of five choices from “very likely” to “very unlikely.” The participants were asked to rate their increase in knowledge on a four point scale from “No Increase” to “Drastically Increase” on all five of the previous issues (abortion, gay marriage, gun issues, federal deficit, environmental regulation). To ensure a high response rate, the surveys were kept very short and an incentive of winning a free sweatshirt was offered.

Data and Findings

159 students completed the initial in-class survey, 90 students completed the first online survey and 64 students completed the second online survey. The response rates were not as high as anticipated, but they still provided an interesting picture of the EMU student body. This research reveals their political identification, knowledge of politics and the effects of targeted internet style communication. This section will cover each one of these issues separately.
Demographics of the Student Body

Not surprisingly, an overwhelming majority of the EMU students when given a choice between Republican and Democrat stated that they identified most with the Democratic Party's ideology. 79% of respondents identified with Democrats and 21% of respondents identified with Republicans. This is consistent with other polls of this age group at a University in our region. While 21% percent of the population stated that they identified more with the Republican ideology, that didn't necessarily translate into votes for Mitt Romney. Only about 15.7% of respondents stated that they currently favored Mitt Romney in the 2012 election. 80.5% of respondents favored Barack Obama. The remainder did not choose to answer that specific question.

But this only tells part of the story. Using the seven point scale used by the National Election Studies to determine the degree to which a person identifies with a certain ideology, we begin to see a more varied picture. One in four EMU
students identified herself as an “Independent Leaning Democrat.” This is the largest group of any of those polled. Coming in at a very close second, is the “Strong Democrat” followed by the “Not So Strong Democrat”. On the other side, we see about 10 percent of the students identified themselves as an “Independent Leaning Republican”, 2 percent as a “Not So Strong Republican” and 4 percent as a “Strong Republican.” This puts those who identify with the Republican Party at only 16 percent of the population. About 13 percent of those surveyed believed themselves to be Independents. Interestingly, contrasting this information when the respondents were forced to pick one of two political ideologies, 9 percent of “Independents” leaned towards Democrat and 5 percent leaned towards Republican.

Most students also reported that they were on the upper end of the socio-economic scale. With a majority of 41% stating they had grown up with their basic needs met and some luxuries. Those stating they had lots of luxuries or the highest category made up 8% of the population. Only 2% of respondents stated that they had grown up in homes where their basic needs were not met. While the population may seem abnormally affluent, this is typical for a population of college students who generally come from middle class homes.
It is a generally held notion that Republicans tend to be more affluent. This is true with adult voters. However, an EMU student growing up in a family with high socioeconomic status did not seem to point to a preference toward the Republican Party. In fact EMU students who identified themselves as republicans ranked their family's finances lower than did all other groups. While independents ranked their families as being the most affluent of any of the groups.

Individuals planning on voting for Romney or Obama clearly had different priorities. The graph below shows the percentage of issues ranked by respondents as the number one priority. 76% of Romney voters ranked their number one issue as reducing the federal deficit. This was followed by abortion and gun issues. It is interesting to note that Romney voters did not once list gay marriage or environmental regulation as their top issues. Obama voters tend to be more diverse in their issue choices but a majority still ranks the national deficit as their number one
issue. This was followed by environmental regulation and a tie between abortion and gay marriage. Obama voters cared least about is gun regulation.

The positions held on issues are rather surprising. Respondents were asked to rank how they felt about certain issues on a scale of 1 to 7. To put yourself anywhere to the left of 4 means that you favor a liberal position while anything to the right of 4 is a more conservative position. Interestingly the average EMU Republican is to the left of center on the issues of environmental regulation and gay marriage. EMU Republicans tend to be furthest to the right on gun rights, followed by the national deficit and abortion. EMU Democrats did not cross the over to the right side of the spectrum on any issues, but were the closest on reducing the national deficit and gun rights. They were the farthest to the left on gay marriage, abortion and the environment.
Political Knowledge and Voting Correctly

Studies done by political scientists, going all the way back to the 1950s, have found that people know surprisingly little about politics. Based on this, there is concern about the public being able to fulfill their role in a democracy. These arguments have been countered by some who have laid out theories of how people can vote correctly even without extensive knowledge of politics or even a rudimentary knowledge of the workings of their government. Some of my findings speak to this debate.

The participants were asked 9 questions to gauge their political knowledge. Some questions were simple, such as “Place Obama and Romney on a scale of liberal to conservative.” but some questions were more complex like “What branch of government can tax and spend?” Overall the students did not do as poorly as expected. This may have been because all of the surveyed students were in political science classes. Out of a total of 9 points, the average EMU student scored a 3.9. The average male student scored a 5 and the average female student scored a 3.1. There has been a consistent gap between men and women in political knowledge. This gap has not gone away with the modern empowerment of women or more women entering the work force.
This gap in knowledge can be at least partially explained by the fact that women tend not to guess on surveys while men are far more likely to do so. This survey tried to correct for this propensity by asking the participants to make their best guess unfortunately many female respondents still left their answer blank in this section and many male students made obvious guesses that ultimately had to be coded as correct responses. However, even taking this factor into consideration, there is still a real gap in political knowledge between men and women, but just not as pronounced as the survey data would suggest.

Knowledge was not evenly distributed across the ideological spectrum. It is clear that the respondents, who identified themselves as being either strong Democrats or Strong Republicans, had more political knowledge than those who identified themselves as independents. This is consistent with other findings that show independents know the least about politics.
The Republicans have a slight edge in knowledge over the Democrats, but it is important to remember that more men identified themselves as republicans in this sample and as previously mentioned men tend to score higher on political knowledge tests than women.

![Political Knowledge by Ideology](image)

Overall there were some very troubling gaps in voter knowledge, almost half the EMU students surveyed, were unable to identify the governor in the state they were going to school in. Fully 34 percent of students were unable to place Mitt Romney or Barack Obama on a scale of Liberal to Conservative. It is these types of findings that have made many political scientists doubt whether allowing these people into a voting booth is a good idea.
But surprisingly, when you compare how voters feel about their top rated issues they overwhelmingly pick the correct candidate that matches their beliefs. The survey looked at the top three ranked voting issues, that a person picked, and then where they stood on each one of those issues. If none of those top ranked issues matched what their candidate stood for, then they were voting incorrectly. In all of the cases, only 2 percent of the survey respondents voted incorrectly using this test. But even then it is difficult to say they these 2 percent actually voted incorrectly because they were only polled on 5 issues. Maybe their number one issue was immigration or foreign policy and the issues listed didn’t really matter to them. In that case they could still be making the correct choice.

Effects of the Advertisements

There were a total of 12 Facebook style advertisements that could be sent out to participants. There was one general advertisement for each candidate. These general advertisements talked about the candidate’s positive track record and gave a general statement about how they would promote future progress. These advertisements were designed to say nothing specific. Then there were targeted advertisements for each candidate, on the 5 issues discussed above (the federal deficit, abortion, gun issues, environmental regulation, and gay marriage). Each participant would receive two ads separated by one week. Half of the
participants would receive the general ad first and half of the participants would receive the targeted ad first.

Vote Romney 2012

Mitt Romney has a track record of success in both government and business. His plan will help put America back to work and create a brighter future for the next generation.

It's time to believe in America.

The general advertisements were meant to create a positive image of the candidate but not give specifics about polices. There were several interesting effects on individuals who viewed the general advertisements first. For the Romney advertisement, individuals who received it first had a better perception of the candidate and more motivation to vote than those who received the general Romney advertisement second. We see that individuals are stating that they are learning things from the first advertisement about deficit knowledge and environmental knowledge.

This is surprising because no information on these topics was included. For the group of individuals who received the general advertisement second, they report learning even more information about the deficit and environmental knowledge than the first group, but also report learning information on all other areas as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Romney Advertisement</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Perception</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote Motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Marriage Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2nd Advertisement</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Perception</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote Motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Marriage Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun Issue Knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Vote Obama 2012

President Obama’s leadership has resulted in many historic accomplishments that have greatly benefited the American people. But there is still much work to be done.

Vote for President Barack Obama to keep America moving forward.

There was a similar phenomenon present with the Obama advertisements in learning new information. Individuals who received a general advertisement first were more likely to say they learned about deficit knowledge and environmental with the advertisement. Participants who received the general ad second stated they learned about these topics although to a lesser degree than the first group. It is interesting that Democrats seem to learn about more topics than Republicans. Another trend in these ads is that Democrat respondents tend to view Obama more favorably when receiving the general ad first. This is opposite of the effect that Romney voters experience.

There could be several possible explanations for why voters stated they learned varying amounts of information from the advertisements. Previous research has shown that people with
more political knowledge will be able to make more inferences about a candidate’s position on other issues. Republicans seemed to be making stronger inferences on Romney’s positions. This could be because they had slightly more political knowledge than Democrats.

The reasons why the changing the order of the ads had a different effect on the Romney supporters compared to the Obama supporters is more puzzling. Originally the evidence suggested that a person would have a more positive perception of a general advertisement after seeing a targeted ad first, because they would have a specific reason to like that particular candidate. This was true for Obama but not Romney. Perhaps this is because Romney voters in this election tend to be more issue based, so if they get a targeted advertisement first they feel like they haven’t been given enough information from the second advertisement, while Obama voters have generally positive feelings about their candidate as a person.

One of the other findings from this project was the ability of respondents to make inferences with the little knowledge they have gained from the targeted advertisements to other
areas of policy. For example in the pro-gay marriage advertisement respondents reported that they had learned a little bit about where Obama stood on abortion, while they learned nothing on gun issues and environmental regulation. Clearly there is a connection in people’s mind between gay marriage, abortion and which type of candidate supports and opposes both.

This trend also existed for many of the other targeted advertisements like the Romney ad about balancing the budget and reducing the federal deficit. In this case respondents linked deficit cutting with environmental regulation. This seems to be an accurate link. Most politicians that want to cut the deficit aren’t the ones talking about investing in clean energy and mass transit.
Obama’s deficit and spending advertisement featured the president’s plans for spending on infrastructure and social safety nets. Voters applied this information to almost every area of policy. The weakest link for information on increased domestic spending was the issue of gun control.

Obama’s environmental advertisement showed the same linkage. Respondents generally correlated environmental policy to deficit policies. Interestingly, when the environmental advertisement was sent first many respondents said they learned more about every topic. Perhaps this is because the ad features Obama standing in front of a windmill. A visual image that makes people think he is a liberal. But in any regard participants were able to draw logical inferences from very little information about other areas of policy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Advertisement</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>2nd Advertisement</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Perception</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>Candidate Perception</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote Motivation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>Vote Motivation</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion Knowledge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>Abortion Knowledge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit Knowledge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>Deficit Knowledge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Knowledge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>Environment Knowledge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Marriage Knowledge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>Gay Marriage Knowledge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun Issue Knowledge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>Gun Issue Knowledge</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the downsides of targeting a person’s interests is that some advertisements will be less popular. Two specific advertisements had low interest among respondents and so the surveys for these were not filled out by any respondents. For Republicans, these included the ads
on environmental protection and gay marriage. Neither Republicans nor Democrats were
interested in abortion and gun control. Even though the survey sample size was small, the data
that was collected can be used to paint an interesting story.

Ronmey’s pro-life advertisement was very
effective at increasing a person’s motivation to
vote and his perception of the candidate. However
unlike many other issues, Republicans were not
making inferences to any other topics from the
stance on abortion. This is the opposite for the Obama pro-choice advertisement. The ad was
generally effective at improving the Democrat’s perception and motivation to vote for the
president. But the Democrats made inferences on Obama’s stance on gay marriage from this
information as well. Perhaps this could indicate that Democrats associate being pro-life with
pro-gay marriage. Young Republicans don’t see the same connection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Romney Pro-Life Ad</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candidate Perception</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote Motivation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion Knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit Knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay Marriage Knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun Issue Knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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<td>12</td>
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We see something very similar when it comes to the gun issue advertisements. For
Romney voters, there was a healthy increase in perception and motivation to vote. There was no
increase in knowledge on any other topics except for the gun issue. However the issue worked
differently for Obama supporters. When an Obama supporter viewed the same the gun control
advertisements, they had less motivation to vote and their perception improved less than for Romney. While they learned the most about the gun issue, they also learned more about several other issues like environmental policies and debt and spending. One explanation for this trend is that in the United States there is substantial bipartisanship on gun rights so being pro-gun does not automatically make you a conservative. However those who are vocally in favor of gun control tend to be strong liberals, like Diane Feinstein and Chuck Schumer. More data would be helpful.

<table>
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<th>Obama Gun Control Ad</th>
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Overall targeted advertisements were generally more effective in motivating people to vote and improving their perception of the candidates. However these effects did not apply for all the targeted advertisements. For example if you received Romney’s deficit cutting advertisement first, it would be less effective in voter motivation and perception of the candidate than the general ad. A possible explanation for this could be since 76 percent of Romney voters list the federal deficit as their number one issue, they already thoroughly know the candidates position on the subject and more of the same information isn’t motivating.
Conclusion

Several interesting trends were discovered from this research. First of all, there is a wide range of beliefs and opinions of the students at EMU. A large percentage of them can vote correctly without having much knowledge of politics. Targeted ads are much more effective than non-specific advertisements. Students are able to make logical correct inferences from seemingly unrelated information.

The effectiveness of targeted communications is not going unnoticed by political strategists. Future campaigns are likely to place more emphasis on targeted ads. Current campaigns focus heavily on general television advertisements which reach a very large audience. Future campaigns will spend a larger percentage of funds to obtain demographic data and target these groups with specific tailored communication. This type of advertising will result in increased participation in elections as well as a better informed populace on the candidate’s platform.

However there may be some disadvantages to this approach as well. For the news industry, there has been a proliferation of media outlets on television and online. This gives people the opportunity to receive only the news that expresses their opinions or tells them what they want to hear. Political scientists have expressed concerns that selected news could be a factor in creating greater polarization in American politics. Now as online targeted advertising
grows, we may begin to see the same polarizing effects here as well. Ideologically different citizens will be seeing completely different sets of advertisements which could further cause a divide in the politics of the country.

There are still many areas that need to be researched in the new field of targeted ads. The internet opens communications channels that operate in both directions so that people can become more easily involved by signing petitions or going to meetings arranged online. Can online political advertising stimulate this type of behavior? We know a little bit more about how college students react to these types of advertisements, but what about seniors or middle age working class people? Although there still many questions, it is clear that targeted internet advertising will be a mainstay in the future.
References


Appendices

Foundation Survey

Contact Information

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Email Address:

Note: Your email address will only be used to send the online surveys to, and then will be deleted. Your email address and all identifying information will be discarded after completion of the online surveys.

1. How would you rate your overall interest in politics?
   - Not at all interested  □  Slightly Interested  □  Moderately Interested  □  Very Interested  □

2. To what extent do you believe politics affects your life?
   - Not at All  □  Very Little  □  Moderately  □  Very Much  □

3. Please indicate which political ideology you most identify with.
   - Republican  □  Democrat  □

4. Check one box below to indicate the degree of which you identify with the above ideology on the scale below.
   - □ Strong Democrat
   - □ Not Very Strong Democrat
   - □ Independent leaning Democrat
   - □ Independent
   - □ Independent Leaning Republican
   - □ Not Very strong Republican
   - □ Strong Republican
5. How would you rate you family's economic situation while growing up?

☐ Basic Needs Not Met
☐ Basic Needs Met
☐ Basic Needs met with few Luxuries
☐ Basic Needs met with some Luxuries
☐ Basic Needs met with lots of Luxuries

6. Which presidential candidate do you currently most favor in the upcoming 2012 election?

Mitt Romney ☐ Barack Obama ☐

7. Rank the 3 issues that are most important for you in this year’s election, with number 1 being the most important to you.

Abortion ___
Environmental Regulation ___
Federal Deficit ___
Gun Issues ___
Gay Marriage ___

8. Please identify yourself on the scale below regarding your positions on the issues that are important to you.

**Abortion**

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Support Strong Protections for Women's Reproductive Rights
Support Strong Protections for Unborn Human Life

**Environmental Regulation**

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Stronger regulations are necessary to deal with global warming and other industrial threats to the environment.
Many environmental regulations needlessly burden businesses and slow economic growth.

**Gun Issues**

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</tbody>
</table>

Support making it more difficult for civilians to purchase firearms.
Protection of citizen gun rights
9. If 1 is Liberal and 10 is conservative, where would you place the Barack Obama and Mitt Romney on a scale of 1-10

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
Liberal  ----------------------------------- Conservative

10. If you are able to, write the current position held by each of the following individuals. If you do not sure of the position held by the individual write in your best guess.

John Boehner __________________________ Don’t know □

Harry Reid ___________________________ Don’t know □

Hillary Clinton _______________________ Don’t know □

John Roberts _________________________ Don’t know □

Ben Bernanke ________________________ Don’t know □

Rick Snyder _________________________ Don’t know □
11. If you are able to, write in the correct branch of government for each question. If you are not sure of the position write in your best guess.

Which branch of government can declare war? __________________________________________________________________________
Which branch of government can tax and spend? __________________________________________________________________________

General Advertisements

Vote Romney 2012

Mitt Romney has a track record of success in both government and business. His plan will help put America back to work and create a brighter future for the next generation.

It’s time to believe in America.

Ad # 1

Vote Obama 2012

President Obama's leadership has resulted in many historic accomplishments that have greatly benefited the American people. But there is still much work to be done.

Vote for President Barack Obama to keep America moving forward.

Ad # 2
Targeted Advertisements

Balance the Budget and Reduce the Debt

Mitt Romney has a detailed plan to balance the budget and restore fiscal sanity to Washington. As president, Mitt's will cap spending at 20% of GDP and continue work to bring federal spending below that by the end of his first term.

Vote Romney 2012

Ad #3

Invest in the Middle Class

President Barack Obama is committed to protecting social programs for hard working Americans, by investing in the best quality education for college students, supporting the social safety net for seniors and America's poor and by providing more Americans access to our Nation's Health Care System.

Vote Obama 2012

Ad #4

Sanctity of Marriage

Mitt Romney firmly believes that marriage is between a one man and one woman. As President he will work to pass a constitutional marriage amendment that will ensure that the Federal government cannot encroach on a state's consensus in this important matter.

Vote Romney 2012

Ad #5
Vote Marriage Equality 2012

President Barack Obama is committed to ensuring equal protection under the law for every individual regardless of their lifestyle. He is the first president to support marriage equality. His administration also has a strong track record of extending federal benefits to same sex couples and repealing "don't ask don't tell".

Ad #6

Protect the Second Amendment

Mitt Romney will work to protect the rights of law-abiding Americans to own and use firearms for sporting, hunting and self-defense. Romney also fully understands the need to appoint judges who will interpret the Second Amendment as originally meant and not put their own personal views into law.

Ad #7

Common Sense Gun Control

President Obama supports the rights of gun owners as guaranteed under the Second Amendment, he also believes that there's room for reasonable laws that keep dangerous individuals from obtaining a firearm. The President supports enacting a federal assault weapon ban, closing the gun show loophole and requiring a mental health screening before purchasing a firearm.

Ad #8
Environmental Policies that Put People First

Excessive government regulation stifles job creation and innovation. That’s why Mitt Romney believes in investing not only in green energy but also utilizing America’s abundant natural resources like coal and oil to help put Americans back to work and make the U.S. energy independent.

Vote Romney 2012

Ad #9

Protecting Our Environment

President Obama has made record investments in clean energy, and refuses to let polluters play by a different set of rules than everyone else. He’s implementing new standards to keep our air and water clean and our children safe.

For our environment vote Obama 2012.

Ad #10

Vote Pro-Life in 2012

Mitt Romney is staunchly pro-life. As president, Mitt Romney would bar the use of any federal funds for abortions, he will work to protect the right of health care workers to follow their conscience, and appoint judges who acknowledge the difference between personal opinion and the law.

Ad #11
President Obama is committed to protecting our right to make our own health care choices on issues like birth control without government or employer intervention. Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, birth control coverage will be mandated as part of all health insurance.

Vote Obama 2012
Political Advertisement Survey

*1. If someone like you were viewing this advertisement, how do you think it would affect their perception of this candidate?

- Drastically Improve
- Slightly Improve
- No Change
- Slightly Worsen
- Drastically Worsen

*2. After viewing this ad how likely do you think someone like yourself would be to get out and vote for this candidate?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- No change
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely

*3. To what degree do you believe this advertisement could increase someone's knowledge about this candidate's platform on the following issues?

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